June 2026 SAFMC Meeting

THE SOUTH ATLANTIC FISHERY MANAGEMENT COUNCIL

Scientific and Statistical Committee

April 2026 Meeting Report

RESILIENT FISHERIES PROJECT

SSC received update on progress.

Ecosystem Information Review:

=> How do fisheries management councils utilize ecosystem data and tools

=> Identify best practices

=> Expanding use of ecosystem information

=> Develop strategies for integration into SAFMC management processes

=> Strengthen management outcomes

RESILIENT FISHERIES PROJECT

- **SSC noted that SAFMC is well-positioned** for incorporating ecosystem information into management process.
  Several products that can be leveraged to support incorporation of ecosystem considerations into management.

- Currently:
  Applications of foodweb model focus on hypothesis testing.
  Recruitment trends used as a proxy for environmental effects.
  => do not provide predictive insight.

Challenges include:

- Lack of standardized guidance for interpreting and scoring ecosystem components.
- Limited availability of environmental indicators for direct inclusion in risk tables.
- Difficulty incorporating environmental drivers into stock assessments.

SERFS update

SSC appreciates annual trends reports and inclusion of Coastal Trawl Survey and SA Deep Water Longline Survey (SADLS).

SERFS update

SSC appreciates annual trends reports and inclusion of Coastal Trawl Survey and SA Deep Water Longline Survey (SADLS).

Discussion and recommendations:

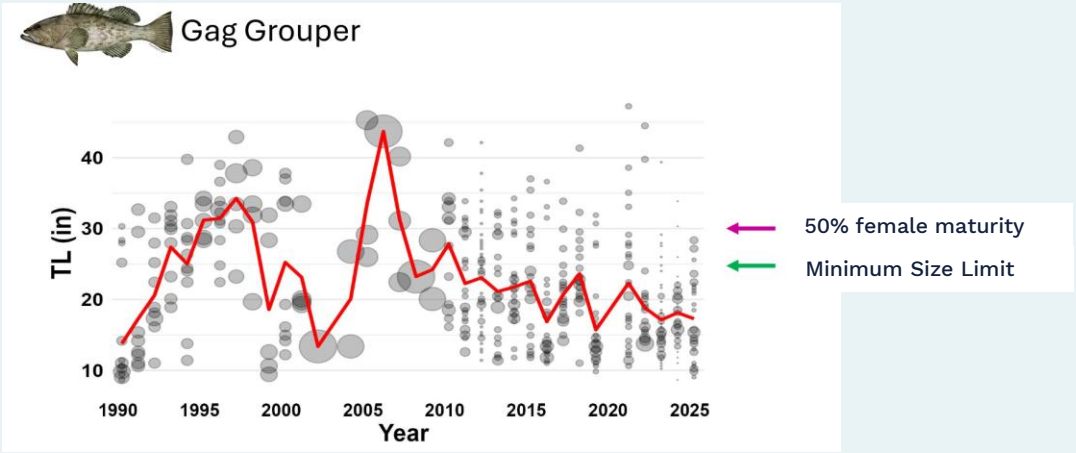
- Spatial and temporal stratification in sampling design.
- Assess abundance distribution to track movement over time.
- Compare NE bottom trawl survey with the SEAMAP Coastal Trawl Survey.
- Shark depredation: data is recorded (SADLS) => may provide valuable information.
- Minimum size limit < 50% maturity (e.g., Almaco Jack and Gag) may be biologically risky for the long-term sustainability.

SERFS update

SSC appreciates annual trends reports and inclusion of Coastal Trawl Survey and SA Deep Water Longline Survey (SADLS).

Discussion and recommendations:

- Spatial and temporal stratification in sampling design.
- Assess abundance distribution to track movement over time.
- Compare NE bottom trawl survey with the SEAMAP Coastal Trawl Survey.
- Shark depredation: data is recorded (SADLS) => may provide valuable information.
- Minimum size limit < 50% maturity (e.g., Almaco Jack and Gag) may be biologically risky for the long-term sustainability.

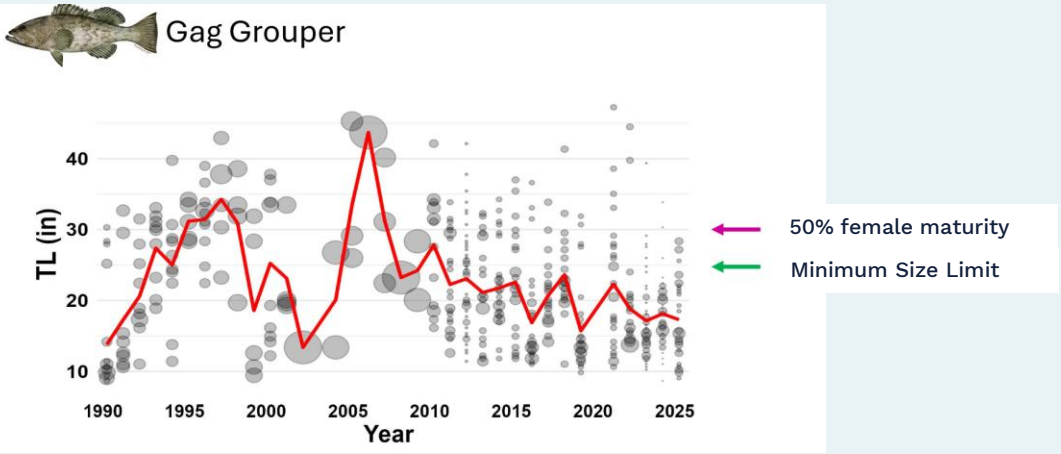


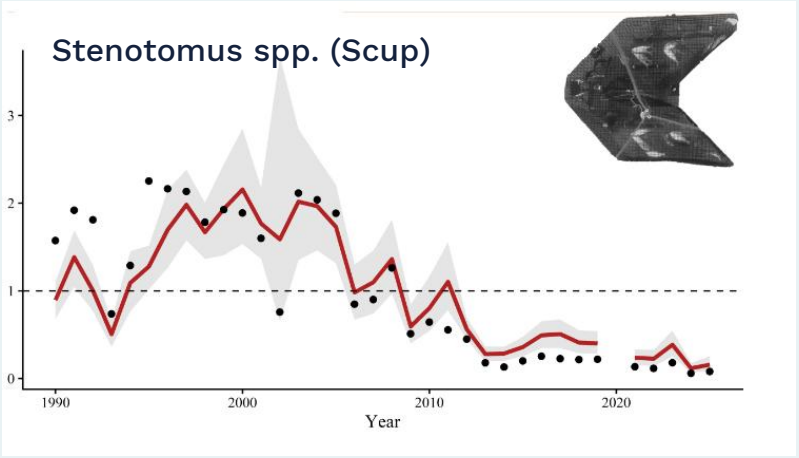
SERFS update

SSC appreciates annual trends reports and inclusion of Coastal Trawl Survey and SA Deep Water Longline Survey (SADLS).

Discussion and recommendations:

- Spatial and temporal stratification in sampling design.
- Assess abundance distribution to track movement over time.
- Compare NE bottom trawl survey with the SEAMAP Coastal Trawl Survey.
- Shark depredation: data is recorded (SADLS) => may provide valuable information.
- Minimum size limit < 50% maturity (e.g., Almaco Jack and Gag) may be biologically risky for the long-term sustainability.





Considerable concern about downward CPUE trends of almost all presented species.

Misc. Other Discussion Items

- Possible removal of species from S/G complex will likely affect ABC CR risk ratings.
- Address ABC Control Rule for tiers 2-4.

- Without Technical Teams, SSC expressed some concerns for its ability to provide feedback during the assessments =>
  discussions during SSC review =>
  requests additional analyses and model runs.
- Black Sea Bass: SSC requested scheduling an in-person SSC review of the assessment.
- Vermilion Snapper TOR: postponed to next webinar.

- SSC Work Groups and SEDAR panels

9 Work Groups/Committees (26 appointments)

10 SEDAR panels (43 appointments)

- **SSC Work Groups and SEDAR panels**

  9 Work Groups/Committees (26 appointments)

  10 SEDAR panels (43 appointments)

- **Elections**

Dr. Walter Bubley was elected as Chair
Dr. James Gartland was elected as Vice-Chair

SNAPPER GROUPER SSC AGENDA ITEMS

THE SOUTH ATLANTIC FISHERY MANAGEMENT COUNCIL

Scientific and Statistical Committee

April 2026 Meeting Report

SARSRP REVIEW

Charleston – January 13-15, 2026

Review Panel:

- Marcel Reichert (SA SSC - Chair)
- Luiz Barbieri (SA SSC)
- Noel Cadigan (CIE)
- Daniel Ruzzante (CIE)
- Joe Powers (CEI)

Research Team Leads:

- Will Patterson
- Nathan Hostetter (BHIM)
- David Portnoy (CKMR)

Four presentations covering two main project components:

Close Kin Mark Recapture Method (CKMR)
Bayesian Hierarchical Integrated Model (BHIM)

Each resulting in a Red Snapper population estimate for the SA region.

Consensus Summary Report and 3 CIE reports.

Bayesian Hierarchical Integrated Model (BHIM)

- Sampling design and sampled locations sufficient to estimate average camera counts for the SERFS sampling frame.
- Abundance over unconsolidated bottom was very low.

- Effective Sample Area (ESA) of video trap gear was critical for estimating total red snapper abundance.
  - RP accepted Chicken Rock study results, only one area over a limited time =>
  - little confidence that resulting ESA represents the overall ESA for the entire stock area.
- SERFS video data and ROV density estimates were expanded to the entire study area, but considerable uncertainty in information of hard bottom habitat.
- Population estimate was sensitive to how bottom type was identified and classified, and this habitat uncertainty was not included in the overall CV of the BHIM population estimate.
- Population estimate not independent from stock assessment data (video trap data used in both)

Review Panel had little confidence in BHIM population estimate.

Bayesian Hierarchical Integrated Model (BHIM)

- Sampling design and sampled locations sufficient to estimate average camera counts for the SERFS sampling frame.
- Abundance over unconsolidated bottom was very low.

- Effective Sample Area (ESA) of video trap gear was critical for estimating total red snapper abundance.
  - RP accepted Chicken Rock study results, only one area over a limited time =>
  - little confidence that resulting ESA represents the overall ESA for the entire stock area.
- SERFS video data and ROV density estimates were expanded to the entire study area, but considerable uncertainty in information of hard bottom habitat.
- Population estimate was sensitive to how bottom type was identified and classified, and this habitat uncertainty was not included in the overall CV of the BHIM population estimate.
- Population estimate not independent from stock assessment data (video trap data used in both)

Review Panel had little confidence in BHIM population estimate.
SSC agreed that BHIM estimate should not be used in assessment.

Close Kin Mark Recapture method (CKMR)

Review Panel:

- Methodology and study design robust.
- Sampling effort sufficient for an initial estimate of population abundance.
- Analyses developed consistent with theory and modeling experience and applied appropriately.

- Uncertainty likely underestimated.
- Abundance estimate based on CKMR not independent from stock assessment information:
  Life history information / parameters used in both.
- Panel recommended additional sensitivity analyses to fully assess potential model misspecification.

Review Panel accepted the CKMR based population estimate providing the Panel's identified uncertainties and recommendations

SSC supported Review Panel decisions on Close Kin Mark Recapture abundance estimate and integration into S90.

Some discussed concerns and uncertainties:

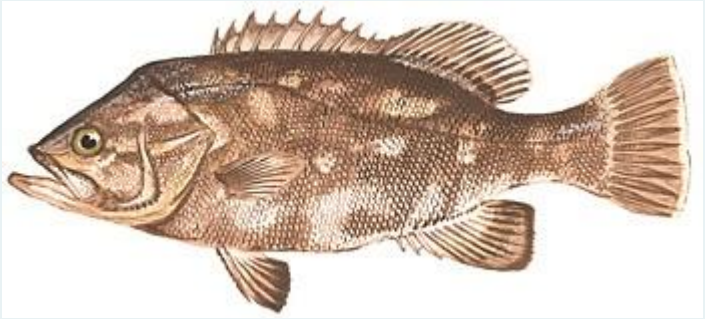
- CKMR results not independent from the stock assessment. Stock assessment CKMR share data inputs with the assessment => May not be major issue.

- Overdispersion in fecundity at age could result in underestimation of CKMR abundance estimates and associated uncertainty.
  - SARSRP team explored overdispersion.
  - Use of fish biomass as proxy for fecundity is being explored in assessment.

THE SOUTH ATLANTIC FISHERY MANAGEMENT COUNCIL

Scientific and Statistical Committee

April 2026 Meeting Report

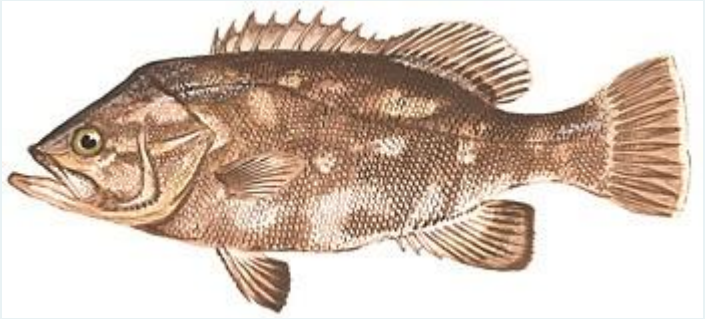


Wreckfish MSE

- Proceeding with the current age-structured assessment approach appropriate.

- Model assumes closed population: assumption is violated because recruits enter population from outside of U.S. waters, and associated uncertainty is unknown.
  Steepness of 0.9 likely nearly decouple recruitment from SSB.

- SSC made recommendations relative to data and model configuration related to time (in index standardization), trip length, catch, length composition, CPUE and steepness.
  - S-R curve from h=0.9 run
  - Investigate lower h (< 0.6)



Wreckfish MSE

- **SEP requested (with SSC support) receiving presentation** with more information about human dimensions components, broader Adaptive Implementable Management (AIM) process, management procedures, etc.

- **SSC asked for clarification (presentation)** and opportunity to discuss how this AIM and wreckfish operating models fit into existing SA-ABC CR and SSC's charge to provide ABC recommendations (also Dolphin MES).

DOLPHINFISH MSE

THE SOUTH ATLANTIC FISHERY MANAGEMENT COUNCIL

Scientific and Statistical Committee

April 2026 Meeting Report

Dolphin MSE

The SSC commends MSE team for vast amount and valuable work.

SSC questions and discussion:

- Primary model assumption is a closed population. Not the case and research team acknowledged. However, associated uncertainty unknown.

- Stock (or management unit) delineation concerns?
  MSE team: likely not enough data to truly delineate stocks.
  SSC agreed that assumption of one Atlantic management unit is suitable.

Dolphin MSE

Uncertainties:

- Selectivity: held constant across years and regions.
  SSC recommended examining potential changes in selectivity.

- Effort distribution: Economic or weather conditions could affect spatial distribution of catch independent of spatial distribution of stock or changes in catchability.
  SSC: Can these can be considered in operating models?
  Project team: related robustness runs were not done, but could address indirectly by parameters within MSE.
  No SSC request until review of preliminary results.

Dolphin MSE

- SSC recommends that BSIA evaluated after CIE review.
- What are implications for stock and use of MSE in management?
  MSE products may not provide traditional scientific basis for management given ABC procedures, but will likely allow for determination of proxy.
- SSC likes further discussion and requested presentation to clarify ABC setting (similar to Wreckfish) .